

# Developing Speech Habits with the Help of Songs

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*By Natalia Orlova*

The idea to use songs in ELT is not new. Songs are considered to be an effective tool for language teaching. In the majority of publications dealing with the topic in question, songs are recommended for teaching phonetics, grammar, or for expanding the vocabulary of the pupils. Moreover, songs can be used to teach English to elementary and secondary schoolchildren or to adults in content courses for beginners. But, for the purposes of this article, songs (folk, rock, country, pop) will be used to teach English to prospective teachers of foreign languages. The reasons for this are as follows.

Songs can perform different functions in language teaching:

1. They can serve as an incentive for speaking English in class. Russian methodologists consider works of art- poetry, prose, paintings-to be effective tools that stimulate the content of foreign language speech (Gurvich 1974). Songs which belong to a genre including both lyrics and music can be added to this list. They are marked by the richness of content, poetical metaphors, and symbols, which emotionally reflect the world we live in.  
In non-English surroundings the main problem teachers of English encounter is how to stimulate students to speak English in class. Songs may serve as a starting point for conversation. Students can discuss a single song, the repertoire of a group as well as different musical trends.
2. Songs can motivate a positive emotional approach to language learning. Exerting emotional influence on a listener, songs can inspire the student to express his/her attitude towards what he has heard. A rock song is particularly close to 18-20 year-olds because of its form, content, and aspirations. This gives students the opportunity to speak on the topic.
3. Songs can introduce students to the music and culture of particular interest to them in the target language community. While listening to a song, students begin to recognize the words and notions easily understood by native speakers but which may present difficulty for foreigners.
4. Songs can effectively contribute to the esthetic development of prospective teachers. They help student teachers to develop their artistic tastes on the basis of a critical evaluation of the songs they listen to and discuss and at the same time help them learn how to use a song in ELT.

The question that inevitably arises is what kinds of songs should one use in ELT. Perhaps the following criteria may serve as a guide: They must appeal to the target audience; they should present a certain esthetic value.

Songs by the Beatles generally satisfy these requirements best of all. They are deservedly considered to be classics of pop music, from which different musical trends sprang up (Gambaccini 1987).

## Technique

The development of students' speech habits through music is comprised of three stages: *preparatory*, *forming*, and *developing*. Each of them has its own objectives.

The first stage is the formation of monological speech habits within the topic "music" and includes reading specially chosen micro-texts on the topic which contain information about different musical trends as well as the history of the Beatles. This should also include post-reading exercises aimed at vocabulary development.

The aim of the second stage is forming speech skills while discussing the songs under consideration. The tasks in this stage should be done in a seven-step sequence:

1. Presentation to the students of pre-listening tasks.
2. Listening to the song.
3. Students answer the pre-listening questions.
4. Post-listening tasks.
5. Presentation of the typed text of the song lyrics.
6. Second listening to the song.
7. Discussion of the song.

As an example, let us consider the tasks fulfilled while working with the song "Yesterday."

*Post-listening questions:* How do the melody and the lyrics evolve? Who is the lead vocal? What can you say about his way of singing? What instruments accompany McCartney's voice? Does the song sound like a classical piece? Whose image is created in the song? What kind of love is depicted in the song? Is the love story told in a highly emotional way or with a tinge of detachment?

Listen to the song again. Is there a proper balance of the singers' voices and instruments in the song? Characterize the main musical elements of the song.

Now listen to the recorded version of the song "Yesterday" by Ray Charles. What differences can you notice in his interpretation? Which singer is more dramatic?

The third stage of using a song in an English class is to further develop speech skills on the topic of "music" and to teach students how to use songs in ELT. At this stage the students are involved in a discussion of the following problematic questions:

Should a person understand only one musical genre or different kinds? Some people say that rock music promotes juvenile delinquency. Do you agree? Is rock music a passing phenomenon,

an ephemeral fad with young people? What do you think are the main qualities of a pop-singer? Could you enumerate at least three of them?

This phase should also include training, so that would-be-teachers of English could have the knowledge and skill to do the following:

- a. be able to select interesting texts on the topic of "music";
- b. be able to analyse the didactic potential of a particular song;
- c. know how to teach a song to the pupils;
- d. be able to give a talk on the musical life of the target language community;
- e. critically evaluate songs with the purpose of including them in class activities.

To develop the skills mentioned above, we suggest the following exercises:

- Study the songs/lyrics by the Beatles. Select those you believe would be effective for language teaching if the discussion were going to be "Friendship," "Parents and Children," "Love."
- Select five songs-traditional, folk, pop-which could be used to stimulate classroom discussion. Say how you would use them.
- Collect interesting stories and articles about music and musicians. Explain how these texts may be effective vehicles for language instruction.
- Listen to the song. Think of the questions you would ask your pupils to help them understand the song.
- Give a two-minute introductory talk on the importance of being a good listener.
- Give a talk on your favorite English/ American composer/group.
- Make up the plan for "My Favorite English/American Songs Party" which could be organized for secondary school pupils.

## Conclusion

A teacher of English should be creative and innovative. Songs in ELT will help to make the process more interesting and effective.

*Note:* I should like to mention that one of the topics for conversation included in the English Department syllabus at Russian universities is "Music and Cultural Life of England and the USA."

## Exercise 1

*Music which is soft and slow, such as lullabies, suggests a quiet, peaceful mood, while music that is loud and fast suggests a buoyant, active mood. Arrange the following adjectives in two groups of antonyms, according to the mood different songs may evoke:*

quiet, peaceful    v    active, buoyant  
- " - " - " - " - "    - " - " - " - " - "

(calm, restful, happy, dreamy, mysterious, self-pitying, intimate, sad, somber, festive, joyful.)

### Exercise 2

*Listen to the song (choose any song you like by the Beatles) and determine the mood the song evokes. Use the adjectives from the exercise above.*

### Exercise 3

*These occupations are related to music. Consult an English-English dictionary for their meaning:*

composer	singer
listener	musicologist
conductor	ethnomusicologist
music publisher	music arranger
music producer	technician in a recording studio
instrument manufacturer	

### Exercise 4

*You may need the following adjectives about the voice of a singer:*

deep, gentle, soft, fresh, clear, lyrical, expressive, velvety, small, quiet, nasal, guttural, hollow, resonant, gruff, harsh, raucous, husky, mellow, metallic, weak, anemic.

*Using the words above, describe the voices of the singers you know.*

### Exercise 5

*Select from the box the words which best describe the music from the point of:*

Mood -	self-pitying, aggressive, intimate, calm, restful,
Melody -	happy, sad, dreamy, mysterious, buoyant, active,
Rhythm -	strong, tuneful, expressive, emotional, lilting,
Beat -	catching, restless, assured, distinctive, light,
Tempo -	heavy, regular (irregular) dese, impatient, abrupt, jaunty, crisp, irresistible, driving, steady, ongoing, definite, strong, slow, solid, quick, swift, moderate, fast.

### Exercise 6

*Study the following synonymous phrases:*

to be on lead (backing, harmony) vocals;

to provide lead vocal;

to sing lead vocals.

*Listen to the song (choose any song you like by the Beatles) and use one of them.*

### Exercise 7

*Listen to the song "Michelle." Select the description*

(either a or b) that fits the song.\*

- a. John Lennon - Acoustic guitar and backing vocal  
Paul McCartney - Bass guitar and lead vocal  
George Harrison - Acoustic guitar and backing vocal  
Ringo Starr - Drums

Written for Paul for the daughter of an American millionaire, the song features Paul on lead vocal with John and George adding the close harmony backing. This was another of the Beatles' songs to become an all-time standard. The song lapses into French now and again as with the phrase "Ma Belle" (My beautiful) and "Sont les mots qui vont tres bien ensemble"

These are words that go together well.

- b. John Lennon - Rhythm guitar and lead vocal  
Paul McCartney - Bass guitar and lead vocal  
George Harrison - Lead guitar  
Ringo Starr - Drums

The lead vocal on this up-tempo ballad sounds double-tracked; it is in fact, a close harmony duet between John and Paul, and it is a fine example of how they blended their two voices to sound like one. It is fine proof that not only could Lennon and McCartney write songs but they could also sing.

(The descriptions of the songs were taken from the book by Russel J.P. The Beatles on record. N.Y. Scribner's sons, ©1982.)

### **Exercise 8**

*Listen to the song "Can't Buy Me Love"*

*Pre-Listening questions:* In the title of the song the subject is omitted. Can you guess what is its?

*Post-Listening questions:*

1. Is the title of the song an appropriate one? Can you suggest other titles?
2. From whose point of view is the song sung? Do you agree with the singer that "Money can't buy me love"?
3. Who is doing the lead vocal, backing vocals?
4. What is the melody like?
5. Is there a dynamism and kinesthetic appeal in the song?

Can you determine the rhythm and tempo of the song.

6. What attracts you more in the song: the music or the lyrics? What is more important for a song: music or lyrics? Why?

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## References

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